

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1850
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 19286

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV EG
SUBJ: FAHMY RESIGNATION--PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

REF: (A) CAIRO 19175, (B) CAIRO 19185

SUMMARY: FAHMY'S RESIGNATION IS GRIST FOR MILL OF THOSE WHO OPPOSE SADAT TRIP TO ISRAEL. ALTHOUGH SADAT HAD GREAT CONFIDENCE IN FAHMY AND HOPED RESIGNATION MIGHT BE WITHDRAWN, BY TIME THE PRESIDENT RETURNED HE HAD APPARENTLY MADE UP HIS MIND THAT FAHMY HAD STABBED HIM IN THE BACK. HOWEVER VALUABLE FAHMY MIGHT BE, AND DESPITE URGINGS BY PRIMIN AND GAMASY THAT ANOTHER EFFORT BE MADE GET RESIGNATION WITHDRAWN, SADAT CONCLUDED HE HAD TO GO. FOR PAST TWO YEARS, FAHMY HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF SADAT AND HAS FREQUENTLY SPOKEN OF RESIGNING. HE SEEMED TO BELIEVE THAT IF HE DID SO, GAMASY WOULD DO THE SAME, CABINET WOULD BE BROUGHT DOWN AND SADAT WOULD HAVE TO GIVE WAY. BUT, DESPITE FAHMY'S RESIGNATION, GAMASY REMAINED LOYAL TO SADAT. FAHMY'S DEPARTURE IS A LOSS TO SADAT. HIS SKILLS WILL BE SORELY MISSED, NOT ONLY BY THE PRESIDENT, BUT BY US. FAHMY'S NUMEROUS DETRACTORS ARE PLEASE WITH HIS DEPARTURE AND CHARGE HIM WITH COWARDICE AND DISLOYALTY. ONLY GAMASY, WHOM FAHMY RESPECTED, IS DEEPLY UPSET ABOUT IT. FAHMY MAY
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NOT HAVE GIVEN UP POSSIBILITY OF BEING ASKED AT SOME TIME TO RETURN TO OFFICE, HENCE MAY FOR THE TIME BEING EXERCISE RESTRAINT IN HIS PUBLIC CRITICISM. HOWEVER, HE IS NOT LIKELY TO HIDE HIS VIEWS IF ASKED. WHEN RIAD ALSO RESIGNED, BOUTROS GHALLI HASTILY APPOINTED AS ACTING FONMIN WHILE MORE PERMANENT CANDIDATES BEING WEIGHED. GHORBAL AND ABDEL MEQUID ARE PROMINENT

AMONG THEM. END SUMMARY.

1. FAHMY'S RESIGNATION, WHICH WAS SUBMITTED NOVEMBER 15 AND ANNOUNCED TWO DAYS LATER, IS PORTENTIOUS EVENT. IT CAUGHT EGYPTIANS BY SURPRISE. WHILE FAHMY DID NOT SPECIFICALLY CITE SADAT'S INTENTION GO TO ISRAEL AS REASON FOR HIS RESIGNATION, HIS REFERENCE TO "RECENT DEVELOPMENTS" IS READ BY ALL AS A PROTEST GESTURE AGAINST THE TRIP. AS SUCH, IT CASTS A PALL OVER THE EUPHORIA BEING DRUMMED UP HERE ABOUT THE TRIP AND IS GRIST FOR MILL OF THOSE WHO OPPOSE IT. AS ONE SENIOR EGYPTIAN OFFICIAL PUT IT, RESIGNATION OF A DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MAKES OPPOSITION RESPECTABLE. AT VERY LEAST, IT REMINDS EGYPTIANS THAT THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION TO GO IS FRAUGHT WITH RISKS.

2. FOR OVER FOUR YEARS SADAT HAS RELIED HEAVILY ON FAHMY IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. THE PRESIDENT HAD GREAT CONFIDENCE IN FAHMY AND DID NOT WANT TO SEE HIM LEAVE. SADAT INVITED FAHMY ACCOMPANY HIM TO DAMASCUS IN HOPE FAHMY WOULD WITHDRAW RESIGNATION, BUT LATTER DECLINED ALLEGING ILL HEALTH. BY TIME SADAT RETURNED A DAY LATER, HE HAD APPARENTLY MADE UP HIS MIND THAT FAHMY'S CHALLENGE WAS MORE THAN HE COULD ACCEPT. FAHMY HAD STABBED HIM IN THE BACK. IF FAHMY WOULD NOT GIVE WAY, HE HAD TO GO, HOWEVER VALUABLE HE MIGHT BE. DESPITE URGINGS BY PRIME MINISTER SALEM AND GENERAL GAMASY THAT
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ANOTHER EFFORT BE MADE TO PERSUADE FAHMY WITHDRAW RESIGNATION, SADAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS RETURN GAVE INSTRUCTIONS TO ANNOUNCE THAT IT HAD BEEN ACCEPTED. THIS WAS DONE WITHIN THE HOUR.

3. FOR PAST TWO YEARS OR MORE FAHMY HAS, IN PRIVATE, BECOME INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF SOME OF SADAT'S ACTIONS. HE HAS OFTEN CHARGED THE PRESIDENT WITH NAIVETE. HE FREQUENTLY SPOKE OF RESIGNING IF SADAT WENT TOO FAR IN MAKING CONCESSIONS. THESE THREATS TO DO SO WERE USUALLY MADE IN CONTEXT OF WHAT HE CONSIDERED USG EFFORTS EXTRACT MORE POLITICAL CONCESSIONS THAN FAHMY THOUGHT THE TRAFFIC COULD BEAR. (THIS WAS ESPECIALLY TRUE DURING NEGOTIATIONS LEADING UP TO SINAI II.) BUT ON THIS OCCASION SADAT'S DECISION GO TO ISRAEL, WHICH PROMPTED RESIGNATION, WAS SOLELY THE PRESIDENT'S IDEA AND FAHMY CONCEDES THAT WE ARE IN NO WAY RESPONSIBLE. (HOWEVER, WIDESPREAD VIEW HERE IS THAT WE PROMOTED TRIP.)

4. OF LATE, FAHMY HAS ALSO FREQUENTLY TOLD US THAT IF HE RESIGNED, GAMASY WOULD DO THE SAME. THEIR JOINT DEPARTURE WOULD BRING THE CABINET DOWN AND SADAT WOULD

HAVE TO GIVE WAY. WE KNOW GAMASY AND FAHMY DISCUSSED LATTER'S RESIGNATION LAST THURSDAY MORNING. GAMASY TOLD AMBASSADOR, NOVEMBER 17, HE HAD URGED FAHMY TO WITHDRAW RESIGNATION, BUT FAHMY WAS ADAMENT. GAMASY ADDED THAT HE WILL REMAIN LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT UNTIL THE END. THUS, RESIGNATION OF FAHMY (AND SUBSEQUENT RESIGNATION OF HIS PROTEGE, MINSTATE MOHAMED RIAD), WHILE A BLOW, DID NOT CREATE CABINET CRISIS.

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5. FAHMY'S DEPARTURE IS A LOSS TO SADAT. HE WAS THE FIRST EGYPTIAN FOREIGN MINISTER IN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS WHO SOUGHT AUTHORITY, AHAD IT DELEGATED TO HIM, AND EXERCISED IT. SADAT WILL MISS FAHMY'S INNOVATIVENESS, HIS IMPRESSIVE EXPERTISE IN FOREIGN AFFARIS, HIS FACILE DRAFTING SKILLS AND THE DEDICATION THAT HE GAVE TO HIS JOB. SO WILL WE. NOT ONLY HAS FAHMY, ALONG WITH SADAT, BEEN ARCHITECT OF WHAT HAS COME TO BE KNOWN AS PRO-AMERICAN POLICY, BUT ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION HE SAVED THE DAY BY DEVISING IMAGINATIBE FORMULAE TO OVERCOME ROADBLOCKS IN THE ME PEACE PROCESS. FAHMY COULD BE DIFFICULT, BUT HIS BASIC INSTINCTS WERE POSITIVE AND RATIONAL.

6. FAHMY WAS NOT WITHOUT HIS DETRACTORS. INDEED, HE SEEMED TO GO OUT OF HIS WAY TO MAKE ENEMIES. HIS EGOISM, ARROGANCE AND UNCONCEALED CONTEMPT FOR THE ABILITIES OF HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES MADE HIM INTENSELY DISLIKED. SO DID HIS PENCHANT GRATUITOUSLY TO INVOLVE HIMSELF IN THE AFFAIRS OF OTHER MINISTRIES. HIS RELATIONS WITH PRIMIN MAMDUH SALEM, WHOME HE SCATHINGLY DUBBED A "SIMPLE COP," HAVE LONG BEEN STRAINED. FAHMY'S ILL WISHERS IN THE

CABINET AND THE PRESIDENCY, WHO ARE LEGION, SHED NO TEARS AT HIS DEPARTURE. HIS CRITICS, LIKE MARWAN AND HASSAN KAMEL, DENY THAT HE QUIT FOR REASONS OF PRINCIPLE. RATHER, SECRET

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CHARGING THAT HE HAS LONG BEEN FEARFUL ABOUT REJECTIONIST ASSASSINATION PLOTS, THEY ACCUSE HIM OF COWARDICE AND DISLOYALTY TO THE PRESIDENT. (THIS IS, IN OUR JUDGEMENT, AN UNFAIR CHARGE,) THE ONLY MEMBER OF THIS AND PAST CABINETS FOR WHOM FAHMY HAD RESPECT IS GAMASY (AND TO SOME EXTENT, HILAL). GAMASY, THOUGH LOYAL TO THE PRESIDENT, IS DEEPLY UPSET AT FAHMY'S DEPARTURE.

7. QUESTION NOW BEING ASKED IS WHETHER FAHMY WILL ACT WITH RESTRAINT OR JOIN HEIKAL AND OTHER CRITICS OF SADAT IN FINDING WAYS TO EXCORIATE LATTER'S POLICIES. WE SUSPECT THAT FAHMY HAS NOT GIVEN UP HOPE OF BEING ASKED AT SOME TIME TO RETURN, ESPECIALLY IF THINGS GO BADLY REQUIRING HIM TO BE CALLED BACK TO REDRESS THE SITUATION. WE DOUBT, THEREFORE, THAT FAHMY WILL ACTIVELY JOIN RANKS OF SADAT'S PUBLIC CRITICS, THOUGH HE WILL NOT BE SILENT IF ASKED. MOREOVER, IF SADAT'S VISIT TO ISRAEL FAILS, FAHMY'S VISCERAL REACTION WILL BE A VOLUBLE "I TOLD YOU SO." HE HAS, OF COURSE, ALSO LONG BEEN A PRIVATE CRITIC OF SINAI II AND HAD DISAVOWED ANY RESPONSIBILITY FOR IT.

8. TASKS OF FINDING A SUITABLE SUCCESSOR AT THIS CRITICAL TIME WILL NOT BE EASY FOR SADAT. WITH MOHAMED RIAD DECLINING TO SERVE IN ACTING CAPACITY, HASTY DECISION WAS MADE LAST EVENING TO DESIGNATE RECENTLY NAMED MINSTATE BOUTROS GHALLI AS MINSTATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND ACTING FONMIN. WHETHER CHOICE WAS BEST THAT COULD HAVE BEEN MADE IS QUESTIONABLE. GHALLI IS ABLE ACADEMICIAN, BUT AS A COPT AND WITH A JEWISH WIFE HE SUFFERS FROM CERTAIN DISABILITIES HERE. AT BEST, IT WILL TAKE HIM SOME TIME TO LEARN THE ROPES. NOR IS IT CERTAIN HOW MUCH AUTHORITY HE WILL BE DELEGATED. POSSIBLE CANDIDATES TO REPLACE FAHMY ARE EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON ASHRAF SECRET

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GHORBAL AND EGYPTIAN U.N. PERMREP ABDEL MEQUID, BOTH OF WHOM COVET THE JOB. OTHER CANDIDATES MAY BE AVAILABLE, BUT THESE TWO HAVE MORE EXPERIENCE WITH SADAT'S POLICY LINE OF PAST FEW YEARS AND WOULD BE ABLE CONTINUE IT WITH LEAST DISRUPTION. SADAT IS CURRENTLY WIEGHING VARIOUS CANDIDATES AND WILL PROBABLY DECIDE SHORTLY AFTER HIS

VISIT TO ISRAEL.
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